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SUBJECT: ITALY PLANS TO FULFILL UN DEMOCRACY FUND PLEDGE

REF: STATE 65746

11. (SBU) Poloff met with Gian Lorenzo Cornado, MFA Office Director for United Nations Affairs, May 10 to deliver points in reftel regarding UN Democracy Fund grant opportunities and to inquire about the status of Italy's \$3 million pledge to UNDEF. Cornado noted that the GOI was aware of the grant proposal period. Although the MFA had not specifically informed Italian NGOs of the project submission deadline, he was certain that NGOs were closely tracking UNDEF grant opportunities. Poloff highlighted the value of participation by Community of Democracies countries in UNDEF projects and Cornado agreed that the work of promoting and strengthening democracy was of great importance. He speculated that Italian efforts might focus on projects in Iraq and Darfur.

12. (SBU) Cornado also reaffirmed the GOI's commitment to supporting UNDEF financially, originally announced by outgoing PM Silvio Berlusconi in New York last September. Italy will fulfill its \$3 million pledge, according to Cornado, although the transfer of funds to the UN had been slowed by across-the-board budget cuts. The defeat of the governing center-right coalition in April 9-10 national elections had further complicated the process, with a new government yet to be formed. However, Cornado said, the MFA would attempt to secure and transfer the \$3 million as soon as a new foreign minister was named (which could happen by next week).  
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